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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 FRANKFURT 000986

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [FAIR](#) [GM](#)

SUBJECT: KOCH AND CDU WIN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN HESSE

REF: A) 2002 FRANKFURT 00550; B) FRANKFURT 00682

1. (U) The Hesse CDU, led by Minister President Roland Koch won the February 2 elections in Hesse with an absolute majority, a first in the state's postwar history. The SPD recorded an unprecedented defeat, falling ten percent from its 1999 results. The Green Party received more than 10 percent, their second best result ever. The FDP got more of the vote than it had for 30 years, but will no longer be a part of the state government. The results are as follows, with the second number showing the change compared with 1999:

CDU:	48.8 percent (+5.4)
SPD:	29.1 percent (-10.3)
Greens:	10.1 percent (+2.9)
FDP:	7.9 percent (+2.8)

The CDU is Happy, But Nobody Else

2. (SBU) The CDU now has 56 seats in the 110 seat state parliament, the slimmest possible absolute majority, but an absolute majority nonetheless. CDU party followers attribute the unprecedented victory mainly to voter unhappiness with the national government, but also to Minister-President Roland Koch's strong performance both in the campaign and as state leader. The new Koch administration will certainly use its mandate for bolder CDU policy initiatives including Frankfurt airport expansion, which Koch energetically promotes. Some CDU members as well as Koch himself did not really want an absolute majority, preferring a coalition with the FDP instead. Koch offered the possibility to form a coalition, but the FDP leadership refused, stating it would have no leverage under the current circumstances.

3. (U) The FDP is now the smallest party in the state and the mood is mainly negative. State FDP Chairperson and current Justice Minister Ruth Wagner said bitterly, "We saved Roland Koch (referring to the CDU financing scandal in 2000) but he reaps the reward." The Green Party recorded its first state election gain in Germany in five years and their second best result ever in Hesse. The Hesse Greens were strong opponents of Frankfurt airport expansion, but constituencies in the neighborhood of the airport saw only a slight increase in the Green vote.

The Hesse SPD in Shambles

4. (SBU) The impact of the defeat is enormous within the state SPD. The party had never received less than 36 percent of the vote in the state's postwar history. Party Chairman and Caucus Chief Gerhard Boekel stepped down from both positions following the defeat. The party now faces a serious power vacuum and infighting over its future direction. The times are now gone when Hesse could be considered a swing state. "Hesse is black now," one SPD member said, referring to the CDU party's color. The SPD won only two of 55 constituencies and lost in nearly all of their traditional strongholds. The SPD results were called "disastrous," "catastrophic," and "apocalyptic." Most SPD supporters put the blame on Chancellor Schroeder. One remarked cynically, "We should go and put stickers on our campaign posters saying 'Thank you Gerhard.'" Some said Boekel did a good job, but his predecessors (Finance Minister Hans Eichel as State Party Chairman and Armin Clauss as Caucus Chief) stepped down too late, leaving Boekel only a year to campaign. Chancellor Schroeder's lukewarm support for Boekel was also viewed as "too little, too late." At SPD caucus headquarters in Wiesbaden on election night, hard feelings towards "those in Berlin" were barely disguised.

Iraq Did Not Play a Role

5. (U) Despite the SPD's last minute scramble with petitions against a war in Iraq, most observers agree that the Iraq issue did not play any significant role in the state elections. In exit polling, only one percent of the voters claimed to have been influenced by Iraq.

Comment

16. (SBU) Koch's victory strengthens his position on both state and national levels. The likelihood of his becoming a chancellor candidate in 2006 is now much stronger. In contrast to CDU Party Chair Angela Merkel, Koch can now say he delivered Hesse for the CDU while Merkel has never won an election. Koch's biggest obstacle will continue to be his polarizing personality. (Hesse Broadcasting presented an exit poll on February 2 showing that Koch is the most polarizing politician since the late CSU leader and Bavarian Minister-President Franz Josef Strauss.) Koch no longer has the FDP to tone down his image and balance his policies. He will have to find ways to accomplish this on his own. End comment.

17. (U) This message has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin.

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